

# Journey INTO THE Bible

## Leader's Guide

### Genesis, Part Two: Lesson Six

### Genesis 42—50

**Suggestion:** When you are ready to begin the Bible study, it is appropriate to open with a prayer. You may use the one provided or one of your own that links with some facet of the lesson, for example, God's capacity to turn evil into good or reconciliation within families.

#### Opening Prayer

*Gracious and loving God, you make us marvel at the ways in which you interconnect with our wants and needs. You demonstrate such involvement when you take what is evil and convert it into something good. Even in the face of our human malice and weakness, you overcome evil by producing good. We see this especially when you take the tragedy of Good Friday and transform it into the glory of Easter Sunday. We ask you to make us your agents of transformation. Enable us to change the pain and suffering in the lives of our sisters and brothers by compassion linked to action. We ask this through Christ our Lord, who is the embodiment of your transforming power.*

**Suggestion:** Welcome newcomers and returning participants and make announcements. Afterwards, read aloud "Setting the Stage."

#### Setting the Stage

In Genesis 42—44, we see Joseph not only as ruler over Egypt, but also ruler over his family. In this capacity, we view his somewhat cold exterior. He has not forgotten his dreams about his brothers. At the same time, he reveals a softer side to his personality with his concern for Benjamin and his breaking down in tears. The brothers appear driven by guilt and anxiety. They show their remorse by their regard for their father and youngest brother. Jacob comes across as the one who initiates the strategy of buying food in Egypt. However, grief continues to overwhelm him. It is only with some reluctance that he allows the ten older sons to take Benjamin with them on their journey. He possesses a resilient faith by invoking God's mer-

cy on his sons when they appear before Joseph. Benjamin emerges as a pawn in the hands of the chief powerbroker, Joseph. Even though humans seem to determine the course of action, God is quietly at work. This can be seen when Joseph wishes Benjamin God's graciousness.

Chapter 45 resolves all the tensions and complications in the Joseph story. When Joseph reveals his true identity, the brothers are dismayed. Joseph then proceeds to provide a theological explanation of all that has happened. It was God who sent Joseph to Egypt, not his brothers. God commissioned Joseph to preserve human lives. Joseph then dispatches his brothers on their way to Canaan with the order to return with their father. When Jacob receives the news about Joseph, he is initially bewildered but then gains control of himself, resolving to see Joseph in Egypt before he dies.

In the finale of the Book of Genesis, the brothers are still guilt-ridden. They wonder if Joseph will now seek revenge, since their father Jacob has died. Joseph reassures them by repeating the theological explanation: Though they intended to do him harm, God intended it for good. Before Joseph dies, he exacts a promise from his brothers that they will take his bones from Egypt to the Promised Land. In this way, the Book of Genesis ends on a note of hope by foreshadowing the Exodus.

#### Text (Genesis 42—44)

**Suggestion:** You may wish to read only Judah's speech in Genesis 44:18-34. One reader is needed. This passage offers a good summary of the Joseph story up to that point.

#### Think and Talk Questions

1. How is Genesis 42—44 related to the preceding sections of the Joseph story?
2. How is Joseph portrayed here in contrast to Genesis 39—41? What do you think about the character portrayal of Jacob and the brothers?

### Additional Questions

1. What do you think about the author's frequent mention of the absence of Joseph in the following passages? (a) "and one is no more" (42:13; repeated in 42:32); (b) "Joseph is no more" (42:36); and (c) "his (Benjamin's) brother is dead" (42:38).
2. Notice how the Joseph story connects the posture of the brothers before Joseph with dreams. Read Genesis 37:7, 9. In the first dream, the brothers' sheaves *bowed down* to Joseph's sheaf (37:7). In the second dream, the sun, moon, and eleven stars *bowed down* to Joseph. Note these passages: "And Joseph's brothers came and *bowed* themselves before him" (42:6); "...they (the brothers) brought him the present... and *bowed* to the ground before him" (43:26); and "...they *fell* to the ground before him" (44:14). It seems the author is drawing our attention to the dreams as the driving force in the story.

### Break

### Text (Genesis 45:1-28; 50:15-26)

Suggestion: It may be sufficient to read only Genesis 50:15-26 since the theological explanation given in Genesis 45:5-8 is repeated in Genesis 50:20. The text may be divided among three readers: (1) narrator; (2) the brothers (50:15b, 16b-17b, 18b); (3) Joseph (50:19b-21a, 25b).

### Think and Talk Questions

1. In what way does Genesis 45 resolve the problem of the Joseph story? Why is the verb "to send" so significant in Genesis 45:5, 7, 8?
2. Do you think that Genesis 50:25 (the request to be finally buried in the Promised Land) anticipates the Exodus?

### Additional Questions

1. Do you think that it is really necessary to have Joseph say in so many words that he forgives his brothers? Perhaps the leader could indicate that Joseph's willingness to forgive is implied in his crying bouts, e.g., Genesis 45:2. It is probably more important to see Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers implicitly contained in the theological explanations of Genesis 45:5-8; 50:20.

2. Do you think that Joseph is a person whom you can not only admire but also imitate? Although Joseph still remembers his dreams about his brothers (42:9), he comes across as a very magnanimous person. Perhaps the leader could refer the group to the Book of Job. The Job of Chapters 1—2 is the paragon of virtue. Despite all the tragedies in his life he remains a saint. This is a Job that we can admire but probably not imitate. However, the Job of Chapter 3 is a different person. He has experienced disaster, disputed with God, and rejected the advice of his "friends." This is a very human Job whom we can both admire and imitate. In which category would you place Joseph? Is he like the Job of Chapters 1—2 or the Job of Chapter 3?

### Wrapping Up

When there are about twenty minutes left in the Bible study, bring the discussion to a close. You may choose to ask if any participants want to share something they have learned. Encourage brevity.

### Closing Prayer

Since this session has focused on God's plan or providence in the unraveling of the Joseph story and the disparity between divine and human ways of doing things, Isaiah 55:8-11 may be a fitting prayer for closing. The translation of the New Revised Standard Version reads as follows:

*"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty. But it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it."*

Suggestion: If there is going to be another Bible study session, this is the appropriate time to remind everyone about the next meeting time and place. Remind the group to read the lesson and biblical text before the session.